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Rowley, Louis E.

Wilson's policies menace to nation

[Baltimore]

[1916]

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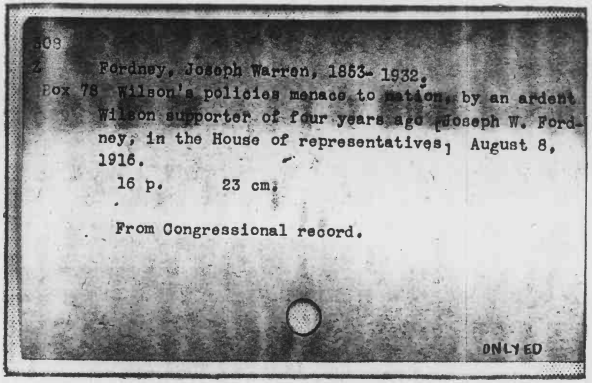
Fordney, Joseph Warren, 1853- 1932.
Wilson's policies menace to nation. by an ardent Wilson supporter of four years ago [Joseph W. Fordney, in the House of representatives, August 8, 1916.
16 p. 23 cm.
From Congressional record.
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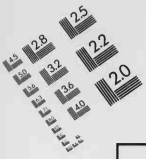

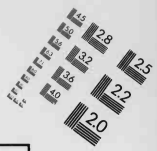

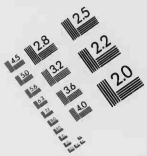

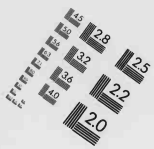

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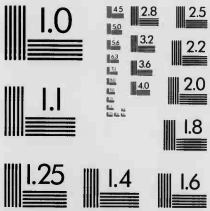

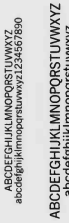

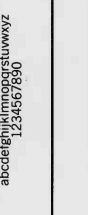

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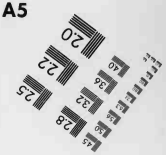

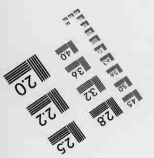

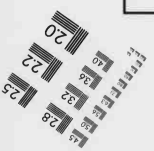

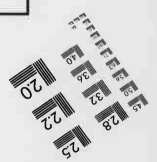

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WILSON'S POLICIES

MENACE TO NATION

BY AN

ARDENT WILSON SUPPORTER OF FOUR YEARS AGO

TAKEN FROM CONGRESSIONAL RECORD
August 8, 1916

Wilson's Policies Menace to Nation

REMARKS OF

HON. JOSEPH W. FORDNEY

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, August 8, 1916.

Mr. FORDNEY. Mr. Speaker, I wish to have printed in the Record a letter written by Mr. Louis E. Rowley, of Lansing, Mich. Four years ago Mr. Rowley was an ardent Wilson supporter. He now proposes to vote for Charles E. Hughes, and in this statement he gives his reasons therefor.

Mr. Rowley's letter, as printed in the Detroit Free Press of August 7, is as follows:

Wilson's Policies Menace to Nation in Mighty Crises—So Declares Louis E. Rowley in Telling Why He Has Turned Against Man He Supported Ardently—Attitude Toward Mexico Brought Reign of Anarchy—Vacillating and Unneutral Stands Toward Germany and England Caused Dangerous Tangle.

(By Louis E. Rowley.)

It was said of Lamartine, the brilliant French writer and political rhetorician, that his career as the virtual head of the short-lived provisional government in 1848 had proved that the government of a great country cannot be carried on permanently by making speeches from a balcony.

The unpractical but well-meaning and highly gifted hero of the democratic reaction in France was supposed to have furnished the most classic example of the failure of specious phrases to do the work of government, but I am regretfully obliged to say that it has remained for the present Democratic President of the United States, in one of the most critical periods of the world's history, to outdo him in this kind of achievement.

I was one of those who ardently supported Woodrow Wilson in both the preconvention and electoral campaigns of 1912, because I regarded him as the most philosophical, the most eloquent, and the most clear-visioned Democratic leader of his day.

I had formed my opinion of his character and public capacities from reading his occasional deliverances, both as a distinguished American scholar and as a thoughtful and luminous commentator on political affairs, and I was led to believe that he would be as wise and courageous in action as he had been in speculation.

But I have learned to my sorrow that a man may be a philosopher in his maxims and yet a palterer in his practice; a statesman in his concepts and yet a fatuous opportunist in his actual handling of public affairs.

I have also learned that even a Democratic label is not an absolute guaranty of clear and undeviating Democratic conduct, and that even the skin of a mellifluous Jeffersonian may conceal an irresponsible autocrat.

I supported Woodrow Wilson in 1912 in the full conviction that he would make a great and worthy Democratic successor of Grover Cleveland, who combined a high idealism with a powerful practical judgment.

"Saving Common Sense" of Cleveland Absent

I am opposing Woodrow Wilson in this campaign in the equally firm conviction that he has neither the intellectual conscientiousness nor the "saving common sense" of the man whose administration shed such luster on the Democratic name.

I supported Woodrow Wilson in 1912 because he stood for "open and disentangled processes of government," for "pitiless publicity," and for the restoration of the "authority of our legislative bodies," which he declared was necessary to the "recovery of their self-possession and self-respect," and in order that "the people may again depend, and depend with confidence, upon their legislators, and not lean as if for rescue upon their Executive."

I am opposing Woodrow Wilson in this campaign because as President he has done more to discourage "open and disentangled processes of government," to stifle publicity, to belittle legislative bodies, and to teach the people to "lean as if for rescue upon their Executive" than any American President since Andrew Jackson, whose arbitrary conduct—to quote from that distinguished work, Woodrow Wilson's History of the American People—"broke the course of all settled policy, forced every question to square itself with the

President's standards, altered the elements of parties"—because, in a word, by his secretiveness, his academic arrogance, and his studied contempt for Congress he has willfully and persistently belied his own oft-repeated and fascinatingly phrased pronouncements on these matters of supreme Democratic concern.

I supported Woodrow Wilson in 1912 because I believed that he would sincerely strive to be a useful and single-minded President of the United States, and would glory in promoting the best interests of his country at whatever sacrifice of his academic predilections.

I am opposing Woodrow Wilson in this campaign because he prides himself on being the "President of humanity" and persistently acts on the theory that his duties are defined, not by the laws of the United States but by the general moral law—according to St. Woodrow.

Pledges of Platform Flouted and Repudiated

I supported Woodrow Wilson in 1912 because I firmly believed that he could be counted on to carry out with a measurable degree of faithfulness the pledges contained in the Democratic platform of that year—pledges which he himself vauntingly declared "say what they mean and mean what they say."

I am opposing Woodrow Wilson in this campaign because he has repeatedly and defiantly flouted and repudiated some of the most important of these pledges, thus paltering with both his party and the country in a double sense, breathing the word of promise to the ear and breaking it to the hope.

I have briefly set forth in the foregoing some of the principal reasons why four years ago I gave my voice and vote for Woodrow Wilson, but I have stated only a few of the reasons which have impelled me to take my stand against him in the present campaign. I have reserved the more important of them for a more extended synopsis and discussion.

But notwithstanding these voluntary and very explicit assurances, he had no sooner assumed the Presidency than he announced that he would take the boldest step toward the realization of the purely academic idea of free trade that had ever been attempted by any first-class modern Government (for even "free-trade" England imposes a revenue duty on

sugar) by wholly removing the tariff on sugar which had been maintained since the days of Thomas Jefferson and which had been defended by Grover Cleveland as "the most logical and equitable" customs tax ever levied by the Government.

Such was the "program of free trade" which Woodrow Wilson made the ne plus ultra feature of his initial legislative policy, despite his vehement preelection declaration that "no Democrat of thoughtfulness" ever contemplated it or would stand for it. However, he forced a Democratic Congress to stand for it two years, and then it repealed it because neither the finances of the Government nor the economic welfare of the country would stand for it any longer. But in the meantime a large public revenue had been lost and a legitimate agricultural industry jeopardized and only saved from practical annihilation by the "world smash" in Europe, which suddenly sent sugar prices booming.

Denouncer of Caucus, He Invokes the Closure

It is to be remarked that neither in the Panama tolls exemption matter nor in his free-sugar coup did the President deign to enlighten anyone as to the real reasons which had induced him to insist on such a startling volte face. He was not frank, he was not consistent, and he was hardly intelligible. Although he had been a vigorous denouncer of the "secret caucus," under whose workings legislators had become "mere automata," he now resorted to the most offensive use of the old tyrannical caucus system to force his pledge-smashing measures through Congress. Even the hateful and undemocratic closure was invoked by him to silence the congressional dissentients to his legislative plans. He assumed an attitude of undisguised impatience and even intolerance toward those who opposed him, and demanded the adoption of his recommendations without debate and without question. He seemed to think that all the functions and all the policies of the Democratic Party were comprehended, controlled, and included in himself, and that it was rank sacrilege to impugn either his wisdom or his acts. As for the Democrats in Congress—

> Theirs not to make reply,
> Theirs not to reason why,
> Theirs but to do—and sigh!

Some of them, of course, swore, but the most of them "took their medicine" as innocuously as possible. Before the authority and prestige of the omnificent White House evangel of the new freedom they were powerless, not to say obsequious.

There is still another and more signal instance of the President's apostacy to his platform obligations. There was one particular plank in the Baltimore platform that was so thoroughly American, so clear, so straight, so inspiringly patriotic that if it had been the only issue in the election all the States in the Union would have been Democratic. Let me quote it here in full:

"The constitutional rights of American citizens should protect them on our borders and go with them throughout the world, and every American citizen residing or having property in any country is entitled to and must be given the full protection of the United States Government, both for himself and his property."

How well this promise has been kept let the shameful and gruesome history of the last three years of abandonment of American citizens and their property and of our national obligations under the Monroe Doctrine in Mexico tell.

Geographical Lines in Protecting Citizens

I know it will be contended that the President has attempted in his own furtive, spasmodic, and irresponsible way to enforce this pledge as against the central powers of Europe; but why shouldn't it mean the same thing in Mexico as to American citizens and their property as it does upon the deck of an armed British merchantman flying the flag of St. George?

Who can imagine a Washington or a Jackson or a Cleveland enacting such a role of executive impotence as Woodrow Wilson has enacted in respect of those American rights in Mexico which the above-quoted splendid plank in the Democratic platform was so evidently intended to vindicate and defend?

I shall touch very briefly upon the other examples of evasion and violation of platform declarations which have been so frequently furnished by the administration. The Baltimore convention reaffirmed the time-honored party pledge to "honestly and rigidly enforce" the civil-service law, but the

President has not only violated the spirit of it by making more purely "personal"—not to say questionable—appointments than any of his immediate predecessors, but he has given his executive approval to acts creating great departmental bureaus and expressly exempting them from civil-service regulations. This was a distinctly retrograde step. There was also a plank in the national platform denouncing "the profligate waste of the money wrung from the people by oppressive taxation through the lavish appropriations of recent Republican Congresses," and demanding "a return to that simplicity and economy which befits a Democratic government"—but which, alas, has not been practiced by it even under the guidance of the most exalted exemplar of Jeffersonianism that has ever woozled the people with language and promises.

From Peace Idealism to Preparedness Swift Step

There has been the same exhibition of vacillation and back pedaling by the President in many matters concerning which he had previously expressed the most positive views. His penchant for dismissing an ugly fact with a golden-cadenced phrase has probably never been more vividly illustrated than in that passage in his message to Congress of December 14, 1914, in which he discussed the question of preparedness—he called it "militarism" then—and in which he declared that to inaugurate such a policy "would mean merely that we had lost our self-possession; that we had been thrown off our balance by a war with which we have nothing to do, whose causes do not touch us, whose very existence affords us opportunities of friendship and disinterested service which should make us ashamed of any thought of hostility or fearful preparation for trouble."

Within three months from the day he made this beautiful and affecting idealistic utterance the President was "swinging around the circle" warning his countrymen that the most urgent duty of the hour was to inaugurate a policy of "militarism," advocating the building of a navy "incomparably the strongest in the world," and raising a veritable continental din with his "fearful preparation for trouble."

It is apparent that the trouble is not with the President's work. It lies elsewhere. His words are good, but his word is not good.

This may sound like pretty harsh criticism, but note how even in his handling of the tremendously momentous international questions which have arisen since the war broke out he has justly merited it.

During the first few months of the war President Wilson maintained an unexceptionable American attitude toward all the belligerent nations. He enjoined absolute neutrality on his countrymen and he practiced it himself. But when the desperate necessities of Germany and England led them to make reprisals against each other that were wantonly violative of international law and of our maritime rights, the President lost his self-possession and turned some epistolary flip-flaps that finally involved the American Government in an appalling mess of diplomatic contradiction and unneutrality.

Administration Blunders in Mexican Situation

Let us now turn from this record of Cervantean (or shall I call it Machiavellic?) diplomacy to review the equally futile but more obstinately exemplified academic dalliance with dangerous matters that has characterized the administration's Mexican policy.

It has been said that President Wilson inherited the Mexican problem from his Republican predecessor. President Taft left him no problems—only a plain official duty. Victoriano Huerta had succeeded to the dictatorship only eight days before Taft retired from office, and in that brief time there was no adequate opportunity to establish official relations with him. And, anyway, Taft was unwilling to do anything which might embarrass his successor, especially in an international determination that was certain to seriously affect the official relations of the two countries. He accordingly left the incoming administration entirely free to determine what those relations should be.

But Mr. Taft himself had the clearest comprehension of the rightful American attitude. Speaking over a year ago on the Mexican question, he said:

"We made a serious mistake at the outset, not in failing to recognize Huerta but in actually departing from the attitude of true neutrality to work against him."

In his simple sentence Mr. Taft exposed the crux of the President's blundering. It was not his withholding recogni-

tion from the Huerta government, but his deliberate attempt to overthrow that government, that made him *particeps criminis* in the Mexican debacle.

As President of the United States Mr. Wilson had only to deal with the actualities of the Mexican situation, but he proceeded to act as though he had been commissioned as the moral governor of the Western Hemisphere. This conception of his mission became an obsession with him and has maintained a solitary despotism in his mind.

Recognition of Carranza Followed by Insult

Although it was the first to recognize Carranza, it has been the first to invade the sovereignty of his government. It sent a large armed force into Mexico over his emphatic protests, and it afterwards added insult to injury by charging him in an official note with "encouraging and aiding" the marauding gangs which it was trying to suppress—a charge which, if true, should warrant it in incontinently pitching him out of office and taking the Government into its own hands.

Later, when Carranza ironically retorted by referring to the American punitive expedition as "interned in Chihuahua," and reiterated his demand for its immediate withdrawal, Secretary Lansing wrote him another "sharp note" of rebuke and warning in which it was plainly intimated that the United States would never—no, never—take its soldiers out of Mexico as long as Villa and his murderous bands remained unpunished—an intimation, however, which was no sooner officially given than the President hurried over to New York and reneged on it.

Of course, Carranza was technically right. The American Army had no business to be "interned" in Mexico. It went into Mexico to get Villa, and it had not got him. Indeed, it had virtually abandoned the attempt to get him. In these circumstances there was no other honorable alternative except to withdraw our Army to the American side. Its continued presence on Mexican soil only served to inflame the susceptibilities of the Mexican people. No nation with a spark of self respect would stand for the indefinite quartering of foreign troops on its territory.

Thus was contributed another of the ghastly paradoxes which have marked the evolution of the administration's Mexi-

can policy—a policy certain only in its weakness and indeterminations, and which attained the climacteric of pharisaic pretenses when the President declared the other day that he had constantly to remind himself that he is not the servant of those who wish to enhance the value of their Mexican holdings.

Question of Protection of American Life and Rights

It is a palpable reflection on adult intelligence to say that it is a question of the enhancement of values in Mexico. It is an infinitely bigger question. It is a question of defense, of the protection of American life and legal rights under Mexican and international law. The statesmanship that takes any other view of it is a misnomer and a fraud. It is gratifying to note that Secretary Lansing does not indorse the President's stand. In his note of June 20 rejecting the Carranza request for the withdrawal of the American troops he used these truthful and weighty words:

"For three years the Mexican Republic has been torn with civil strife, the lives of Americans and other aliens have been sacrificed, vast properties developed by American capital and enterprise have been destroyed or rendered nonprofitable," etc.

These are the weighty things which the Secretary of State recited to justify the retention of our Army in Mexico. There is not a word in his note about the mythical "sinister" American interests in Mexico—about the bugaboo of enhancing the value of Mexican values. He was talking in a serious strain. He was under the necessity of stating facts, of making out an American case that would stand the test of the searching scrutiny of the chancelleries of the world. Moreover, he was laying the ground for an appeal to American patriotism, if war should come, and he knew that the professional twaddle about the "American adventurers" in Mexico would never do. That demagogic device served very well while President Wilson was trying to create the popular impression that he was preventing us from being made the victim of a plot to enhance by war the value of the holding of "predatory" American interests in Mexico. But when the country was actually facing the possibility of war as a result of the breakdown of the administration's puerile and pedantic policy of "serving mankind," instead of the interests of the American Nation, it was necessary to tell the truth and to admit that for three

years the "lives of Americans" had been wantonly sacrificed in Mexico without eliciting anything more than an occasional mildly deprecatory "note" from the Washington Government, which almost invariably reserved the sharpest rebukes for those arch trouble makers, the "American adventurers" who had been presumptuous enough to act on the theory that the American eagle is not a hen bird.

It was inevitable that, with the perplexities and futilities that were bound to inhere in the policy of watching and waiting (only to "butt in at the wrong time!) our relations with Mexico should rapidly progress from worse to worse—and the worst was attained when the President sent the punitive expedition into Mexico to catch the elusive Villa. It signalized the complete collapse of the vaunted policy that was to restore order and "the rule of the people" in the stricken Republic. But no one really believed that he would go very far in playing the part of a "strong elder brother" to Mexico—not even when he was threatening Carranza in his biggest bow-wow strain and mobilizing all the available State militia to make a formidable military demonstration along the Rio Grande. Nearly everybody was convinced that the man who had dispatched the American Fleet to attack and capture the seaport of Vera Cruz on the pretext of obtaining a salute to our "insulted" flag, and then had suddenly and ignominiously recalled the fleet after presenting the keys of the city to that inveterate American hater, Carranza, without receiving or stipulating for the long overdue salute to our flag, could not be depended upon to pursue any aggressive policy to a definitive conclusion.

Pales Before Conditions Rhetoric Can Not Alter

Thus was again illustrated the fateful propensity of Mr. Wilson to be forever starting something which he either can not or will not finish. He frequently talks in a very brave and even highly provocative fashion, but just as he gets the whole country worked up to follow him, he stops and sounds the note of retreat. This is the inevitable consequence of his pedantic dependence upon "the teeming wonder of his words" to achieve his ends. When he goes up against conditions which no spell of rhetoric can conjure away he loses all his driving power and relapses into a state of complete Executive desuetude.

It is not necessary to impugn the President's intentions to emphasize the failure of his amazing Mexican misadventure. We are bound to say that Mr. Wilson's character presents one of the most puzzling paradoxes in American history; the peculiarities of a mind in which great powers are formed in company with great weaknesses. He is at once the most self-willed idealist and the most vacillating executant that has ever filled the presidential office. Inflexible as granite when his scholastic crochets are concerned, he is as weak as heliotrope in applying principles and enforcing administrative policies. A peculiarly repellant combinaton of doctrinaire and dictator when he has an acadamic theory to impose on Congress or an individual (like the "usurper" Huerta) to punish and pursue, he is the incarnation of indecision and feebleness when he faces the responsibility of effectuating concrete statesmanlike designs.

Instincts of Practical Statesman Are Absent

So far as his relations with Congress are concerned, the President is the acid impersonation of aloofness. He has not counseled with it; he has only dictated to it. He has no capacity for teamwork unless he is driving the team. He lacks the practical statesman's instinct and guidance concerning men as well as concerning public measures. It may seem a strange thing to say, but there is hardly a Democratic member of either House who fully trusts the President or is fully trusted by him.

> "Those he commands move only in command,
> Nothing in love."

Apparently his idea of the Democratic majority in Congress is that it should study and conform to his own cranial convolutions—that it is a mere dot above the presidential "i," something that follows, of course, and need not be seriously considered. Naturally the Democratic congressional leaders deeply resent this presidential attitude but they could probably put up with it with far more grace than they do if they had any real confidence in the statesmanlike judgment and consistency of Mr. Wilson. But they have learned from bitter experience that he does not hesitate to put them in a false and humiliating position—as was shown in the Panama tolls exemption case and later in the controversy over the

McLemore resolution—provided he can only win an ephemeral triumph for himself or for one of the sumptuous Princetonian proposals.

The Democratic leaders know how uncertain and undemocratic he is—how vague and vaporish are his convictions, and how purely academic is his political philosophy. They know how inaccessible he is to appeals made to him from honest motives and with naught but the most friendly feelings. But they know also how skillful he is in the use of his single but unrivalled talent of literary bamboozlement—of indulging in large dithyrambic affirmation and lofty moral reflections which the multitude applaud without analyzing. Like the President himself, the Democratic leaders have come to believe that these grand ear-tickling utterances can be depended upon, like the beneficent wind in the fairy tale, to blow everything into the right place—if not in an economic or governmental sense, then at least in a partisan sense, which is what some of them are chiefly concerned about.

But it is certain that the great majority of thoughtful and patriotic Americans will demand something more than the command of an attractive literary style as the chief qualification of their President. They know that something more than this is necessary for effectiveness in statecraft. They want some assurance as to where their President is going to stand. They know that while Mr. Wilson has an enormous capacity for rousing great public expectations, he has little, if any, capacity for realizing them; that while he assumes to exemplify the highest public rectitude, he does not hesitate to discard one conviction after another, as if they were so many worn-out gloves, if political exigencies happen to require their sacrifice; that while he has boasted of keeping us out of war, he has persistently pursued a course that has made for war by either running away from duty or perversely miscomprehending it; that while he has urged neutrality upon everybody else, he has been a most lax practitioner of it himself; that while he has warned the people not to get "nervous and excited" about preparedness, because "the question has not changed its aspect even if the times are not normal," he has worked himself up into a perfect furor of excitement lest Congress and the country shall not back him up in a big armament building program; that while he has protested his unalterable opposition to armed intervention in

Mexico, he has done more intervening in that country than any President since Polk; that while he has talked bravely and finely about his "lullaby policy" that is to "serve mankind," he has really had no policy at all, but drifts, drifts.

Country Passing Through Tremendous Crisis

Speaking as a Democrat, I would not give my vote to indorse such a record as the present administration has made if Thomas Jefferson had indorsed it a thousand times. I say it sadly, but in many respects Woodrow Wilson has been the most undemocratic President the country has ever had—undemocratic alike in his temper and in his conception of the functions of his office. If a Republican President had done the arbitrary, inconsistent, and incredibly maladroit things which Woodrow Wilson has done from the very outset of his presidential career, the Democratic leaders and press would long ago have united in a deafening demand for his summary impeachment as an intolerable dictator. They are only prevented from doing so now by the fact that over his head flies the Democratic flag, which in the stress of a presidential contest they prefer to the flag of their country.

But I can not take such a narrow, partisan view of my responsibility as an American voter. We are passing through one of the most tremendous crises in world history. Tempest weather is still threatening. Even the signing of a peace concordat in Europe may increase rather than diminish our national difficulties by precipitating a revolutionary tumult that will rival the war in its world-convulsing consequences. In any event the end of the war will bring momentous economic and international changes. If there was ever a time when the United States needed wise, strong, and steadfast statesmanly guidance, it is in these destiny-fraught days.

Fortunately in the midst of our national anxiety and bewilderment one rock of assurance rears its head. It is the figure of that courageous, masterful, and forthright American statesman, Charles Evans Hughes. "He is a tried and proved certainty," is the tribute which was paid to him by the Democratic New York World over eight years ago. No one has ever accused him of rhapsodizing or trimming in the presence of grave public perils. No one has ever questioned his intellectual conscientiousness. He owes all of his national prominence to the independence, the directness, and

the unhasting thoroughness of his political action. Never in all his public career a bidder for popularity, he has nevertheless been taken up by the people and advanced to the highest official position. By consequence his career is one of the great examples, one of the great inspirations, of our country. All of which goes to prove that he has the quality of a representative mind—the mind of a real leader to whom the people instinctively turn in a time of national need.

I shall therefore vote for Charles Evans Hughes with the same patriotic confidence that I voted for Grover Cleveland. Although a Republican, there is no suggestion of the lock step in his partisanship. He strides out for himself. And this is a mighty significant fact to keep in mind to-day when American political parties differ chiefly in the accident of personnel. If they differ in theory, it is in the matter of emphasis rather than of belief. Woodrow Wilson is a Democrat in name, but he has the instinct of a tyrannical dogmatist. Hughes is nominally a Republican, but he is the incarnation of the Democratic characteristics of sincerity, equality, frankness, and square dealing. Moreover, he is the one American statesman who has shown that he can refer to principle on all occasions without losing his hold on practice and keep a firm grip of elevated public ideals without forgetting the art of adapting them to actual conditions.

Just before he assumed the Presidency, in 1913, Woodrow Wilson said that "the rarest thing in public life is courage" —an impressive saying which he proceeded to exemplify in his ingratiatingly grandiloquent way by announcing that "the people of this country are going to be served by conscience and not by expediency."

But a rarer thing in public life is the man who has not only courage and conscience but also common sense, and how fortunate is the country that after March 4 next will be served by a man possessing all three.

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